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*History of Redwood County, Minnesota.* Compiled by FRANKLIN CURTISS-WEDGE. Reviewed by JULIUS A. SCHMAHL, secretary of state. In two volumes. (Chicago, H. C. Cooper Jr. and Company, 1916. xiii, viii, 1016 p. Illustrated)

Until a model history of a Minnesota county shall have appeared, the student will probably be less interested in the content than in the execution of such county histories as are put forth from time to time in this state. It is so with the *History of Redwood County*. In subject matter the work is similar to most county histories, particularly to the histories of other counties located within the same settlement area, the valley of the upper Minnesota River. In its execution, however, this history shows a degree of progress, and thereby contains elements of promise, which distinguish it from other histories produced by the same company and from the general run of commercial histories. It is therefore not enough, in this connection, merely to label it "a county history of the familiar commercial type," and dismiss it with a recapitulation of its class characteristics.

Among the distinctive features of the *History of Redwood County* is the presumably unusual degree of authoritativeness attaching to it, not only because it was compiled by an experienced worker in the field of county history, but also because it was "reviewed" by a man whose standing and whose knowledge of the subject admirably fitted him for that service. Another feature, especially welcome to the student, is the use of references at the end of each chapter to the authorities upon which the chapter is based. An excellent map of the county also marks a step in the direction of supplying indispensable aids to a complete understanding of the text. With reference to the Cooper histories alone,<sup>2</sup> an improvement is to be noted in the relative arrangement of the historical and biographical matter. The plan, hitherto followed, of devoting a chapter here and there to "biographical reviews" is here discarded for the more logical division of the whole into history and biography, a separate volume being devoted to each. The two volumes are also somewhat more attractive in appearance than others of the same origin.

<sup>2</sup> For a review of two Cooper histories, those of Wright and Ren-ville counties, in conjunction with a number of other county histories, see MINNESOTA HISTORY BULLETIN, 1: 378-386.

But not a few of the old faults still persist, while some of the new virtues have little more than a promising foothold. There is no improvement in the matter of indexes: the historical volume has none. The map of the county, already referred to, should face the text instead of the table of contents. Illustrations, with the exception of the frontispiece, are all located in the volume of biographies, although a number of them properly belong with the historical narrative. References to authorities and sources are too general as a rule; for example, among the "references" appended to chapter 7, "The Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society (fifteen volumes)" are cited without specifying volume or page. Other references bring out the fact also that the text to which they are appended is not only, as professed, a compilation, but also that it is a compilation from compilations, not *ad infinitum* perhaps, but to an extent which greatly diminishes the value of the work as a contribution to Minnesota history. A particularly clear indication of this second, third, or perhaps fourth hand character of some of the material used is to be found in the "Authority and References" at the end of chapter 5: "This chapter is a somewhat free compilation from articles by Return I. Holcombe in 'Minnesota in Three Centuries,' and by P. M. Magnusson in the 'History of Stearns County.' These articles were in turn compiled from other sources. To this material, the editor of this work has added numerous notes and facts, gathered chiefly from 'The Aborigines of Minnesota,' and from Part 2, of the 'Eighteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology,' 1896-97. Information has also been gathered from the 'History of the Sioux Massacre,' by Charles S. Bryant, and contained in the History of the Minnesota Valley, 1882. The article in Minnesota Valley book was in turn compiled from the 'History of the Minnesota Indian Massacre,' by Charles S. Bryant and Abel B. Murch, 1863." A more direct use of the primary sources, together with closer attention to the aids essential to the ready finding, interpreting, and supplementing of information in the text, would have been desirable.

Most county histories are defective in organization, and this work affords an excellent opportunity for an elaboration of that oft-repeated criticism. An analysis of the general arrangement of the material will best illustrate what is meant by faulty organ-

ization. The first fifteen chapters of the historical volume deal for the most part with the physical features of the county, with conditions and events prior to the beginnings of permanent settlement, and with the political status of the region in its evolution from Spanish territory to a Minnesota county of its present dimensions. The materials for these chapters are so arranged as to present on the whole a fairly coherent and unified introduction to the history of the county proper. The individual chapters, however, are rather loosely organized. In the first chapter, for example, the purpose, apparently and quite properly, is to acquaint the reader in a general way with the location and character of the county and with the main features of the present life of the community, but this purpose is partly defeated by the inclusion of statistical and historical material which properly belongs in the body of the work. Though it carries the title "Geographical Conditions," the chapter includes paragraphs on such subjects as trading centers, nationality, and education.

The organization of the much larger mass of materials which relate to the actual settlement and development of the county is even more open to criticism. These materials are embodied in a series of loosely correlated topical narratives which deal with distinct phases, and embrace varying periods, of the county's history. In these chapters whatever of continuity and unity the preceding narrative may have possessed disappears, not so much because the topical method is employed, as because of the utterly haphazard arrangement of the topics. Chapters on "Pioneer Experiences" (33) and "The Pioneer Period" (41), which, chronologically considered, might well appear earlier in the series, are placed, the one in the middle, and the other well toward the end. Any number of accounts which are chiefly important for later periods precede them, and there is no apparent connection between them and the chapters among which they are found. On the other hand, chapters which do not fall so readily into a chronological scheme, but which relate to a common phase of the history, are distributed without particular reference to such relationship. The following chapters relating to farm life in the county, for example, occur in the series as follows: "Live Stock" (23), "Ditching" (24), "Butter and Cheese Making" (29), "Agriculture of Today" (30), and "The Redwood Hol-

stein Farm" (37), with chapters on such topics as physicians and surgeons, newspapers, churches, townships, and villages, intervening. Such an arrangement of materials as this results in a lack of recapitulations, allusions, and summaries, by means of which a more central viewpoint might have been maintained. In other words, the series of chapters produces the effect of a mere collection of separate articles on detached subjects rather than of an orderly, connected, and forward-moving succession of narratives contributory to a main theme.

It is clear that a county history, if it is to be a real history, must be thoroughly organized on the basis of some comprehensive and intelligible plan. The question, then, naturally arises as to what methodological principle or principles may be followed to the best advantage in the construction of such a plan. Obviously, the broad divisions of the whole subject will be chronological, and the question really arises only when it comes to dealing with that period which is concerned with settlement and development, and which embraces the history of the county proper. Ought this complex subject to be subdivided chronologically according to periods, which, in turn, may be considered in their several phases; or ought it to be subdivided logically according to phases or topics, which may be dealt with in an approximately chronological order? The later is, in general, the method followed in the Redwood history. Although the full possibilities of this method are not, as has been seen, brought out in this work, and may not have been exhausted by other county histories, it is the one commonly employed, and is therefore the one with the limitations of which students are most familiar. A study of the results so far obtained by its use warrants the assertion that the topical method does not encourage a thorough preliminary study of all discoverable relationships between one set of facts and other sets of facts, and too often leads to the writing of fragmentary sketches. It does not require a rigid selection of significant facts, and so leaves room for the inclusion of much insignificant detail. The topical method must fail, even with proper transitions from one subject to another, to convey an adequate sense of the evolutionary character of the subject—of the gradual unfolding of the community life in all of its various phases.

On the other hand, both the advantages and the limitations of a method predominantly chronological, as applied at least to Minnesota county history, have yet to be demonstrated. It is believed, however, that this method might be used, and used to advantage. Suppose, for instance, that the chronological method had been followed in the history proper of Redwood County. The settlement and development period would then have been divided into a number of sub-periods. In fact, it might have been treated in accordance with an outline of the story of Redwood County which is introduced in chapter 2 "for purposes of consistent study." In this outline the "Agricultural Era," as it is called, is divided into "The Pioneer Period, 1864-1872," "The Grasshopper Period, 1873-1877," "The Period of Rapid Growth, 1878-1905," and "The Modern Period, 1906-1916." Had this outline been used consistently as a working plan instead of being offered to the reader merely as a key to the finished work, the work itself might have served "for purposes of consistent study." Matter relating to the pioneer period, instead of being distributed among widely scattered chapters on "County Commissioners and Their Meetings," "Highways and Bridges," "Education," "Difficulties Overcome," and so on, might have been worked up into a well-rounded history of the county, in all its various phases, during that particular period. The same method might have been followed for other periods. This chronological grouping of the various phases of the county's history would have tended to give them a significance which they otherwise lack. Railroads, for instance, instead of being treated as railroads merely, might have been considered also as a factor in the development of the county at various stages, a factor with or against which other factors were operative. It so happens that the beginnings of railroading in the county were contemporaneous with the famous grasshopper scourge, yet the chapter on railroads in this history contains not the slightest indication of that fact. A comprehensive account of the period, whether it were best called "The Grasshopper Period" or not, would have served to bring out the effect of the scourge upon the construction and operation of railroads, and the separate or combined effect of these two factors upon the progress of settlement and growth. In a word, it would seem that a fundamentally chronological treatment would have

resolved the great variety and extent of material into a unity approximating, as nearly as the limits of thought and language allow, the essential oneness of the community life.

It must be admitted that it is much easier to outline than to execute a work along these lines. It may be that the more ideal method would prove the less practical. It ought, however, to be put to the test. And even if the topical method continues to determine the final form of the county history, a thoroughgoing preliminary analysis and synthesis of the raw materials in accordance with chronological principles will be absolutely essential to an adequate treatment of the several topics—to the production, in short, of a real history.

FRANKLIN F. HOLBROOK